Hanover and District Hospital
Patient Information Services
Infection Control

Special Isolation Precautions for Patients with *Clostridium difficile (C.difficile*)

Patient and Visitor Information

What is *Clostridium difficile (C. difficile*)?
C. difficile is one of the many types of bacteria that can be found in feces (bowel movement).

What is *C. difficile* Disease?
Bacteria are normally present in your bowel. Diarrhea can occur because antibiotics kill some of the bacteria that usually live in your bowel. This upsets the normal balance. Harmful bacteria such as *Clostridium difficile*, if present in your bowel, can overgrow. When *C. difficile* grows, it produces toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. The disease is usually mild but sometimes can be severe. In severe cases, surgery may be needed, and in extreme cases *C. difficile* may cause death.
The risk of *Clostridium difficile* is higher if you have been in the hospital.

What are the symptoms?
The main symptoms of *C. difficile* disease are:

- Watery diarrhea that may contain mucus and/or blood
- Fever
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain or tenderness
- Loss of Appetite

Who gets *C. difficile?*
C. difficile disease usually occurs during or after the use of antibiotics. Old age, presence of other serious illnesses and poor overall health may increase the risk of severe disease.

How will your Doctor know that you have *C. difficile*?
If you have symptoms of *C. difficile*, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if *C. difficile* toxins are present.

How is *C. difficile* treated?
Treatment depends on how sick you are. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe disease, antibiotics are required.

How does *C. difficile* spread?
When a person has *C. difficile* disease, the bacteria in the stool can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans, or commode chairs. When touching these items our hands can become contaminated. If we then touch our mouth without washing our hands, we can become infected. Our soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces.

How to prevent spread?
If you are in the hospital and have *C. difficile* diarrhea, you will be put on isolation precautions until you are free from diarrhea for at least two days. Your activities outside the room may be restricted. All health care staff who enter your room wear a gown and gloves. Everyone MUST clean their hands when leaving your room. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom. Cleaning hands is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of *C. difficile*. As well, a thorough cleaning of your room and equipment will be done to prevent spread of the infection.

What should I do at home?
Healthy people like your family and friends who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting *C. difficile* disease.

Hand hygiene
Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds:
- After using the toilet
- After touching dirty surfaces
- Before eating
- Before preparing meals

Cleaning the house
Use an all purpose household cleaner. Follow the directions on the label, and:
- Wet the surface well and clean using good friction
- Allow the surface to air dry
- Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with feces such as the toilet and sink. Remove any visible feces, and then clean as described above

Cleaning clothes/ other fabric
Wash clothes/fabric separately if they are heavily soiled with feces:
- Rinse off feces
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- Dry items in the dryer on high heat, if possible
- Dry clean where appropriate

Cleaning dishes
Regular cleaning – use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water.
It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should not use any drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium). If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor.

For more information on *Clostridium difficile*, visit http://www.health.gov.on.ca